

1866

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
CONFERENCE, WITH DEPUTY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION MORTIMER DOWNEY,
ADMIRAL PAUL DAVID MILLER, US ATLANTIC COMMAND, REAR ADMIRAL WILLIAM
LAHEY, COMMANDER, 7TH COAST GUARD DISTRICT, PRIOR TO VISITING
GUANTANAMO
KEY WEST, FL
AUGUST 22, 1994

Secretary Perry: Thank you very much, Dennis.

Secretary Downey and I made this trip down here today -- and we're going on to Guantanamo after we finish our visit here -- because we wanted to get a firsthand assessment of the operations being conducted jointly by the Navy and the Coast Guard to rescue the Cuban migrants who were fleeing from Cuba in the last few days.

This has been a very complex operation. The Navy and the Coast Guard have worked closely together in executing it. I must say that I'm enormously impressed with the effectiveness of this operation and the way in which the Navy and the Coast Guard are working together on it. It has been successful in saving hundreds of lives. It's being done very professionally and with great compassion. I want to take this opportunity, though, to urge Cubans not to get on these boats, not to come to sea. It's a very dangerous operation. We are doing our best to save the people who are going out on these makeshift boats, and so far have been successful.

The Cuban migrants that we are picking up, we are transporting to Guantanamo and when I finish here in Key West today we will be flying next to Guantanamo to view the facilities being prepared there for their arrival.

We have brought into this area already 25 ships -- 19 Coast Guard cutters and six Navy ships. Three more Navy ships will be here in the next 24 to 48 hours. We have accommodated a flow of migrants which has exceeded a thousand people a day in the last few days. We don't know how many more we are expecting in the next few days, so we are prepared to continue to accommodate if that flow continues. We are preparing facilities at Guantanamo Bay for receiving these migrants.

I'd like to turn over the podium to Secretary Downey and let him describe Coast Guard operations here. Then he and I and Admiral Lahey and Admiral Miller will be available for any of your questions.

Deputy Secretary Downey: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

On behalf of the Department of Transportation, I'm down here with Secretary Perry to look at what both the Coast Guard and the Navy are doing. As he said, it is a fully integrated operation. The Coast Guard has deployed 20 cutters and will have more here. It's very complex, both in terms of picking up the migrants out of the straits and moving them all the way to Guantanamo. As he said, we would much prefer it if the Cubans would not put their lives at risk. It's very, very risky out there. The operation is with many, many rafts, inner tubes, and other makeshift vessels. As such, we can't be sure that we're catching them all, but we are doing our best to do that and we will keep it up as of now. We are keeping up with the flow, but it's putting a tremendous strain on the Coast Guard and on the Navy. We want to keep at it.

We'll be glad to answer your questions.

Q: (Inaudible)

Secretary Perry: I comment only by observing that Guantanamo is fenced off and we do not permit Cubans to enter Guantanamo. Up until now, the Cuban government has not permitted Cubans to approach that, but the barriers there are really both Cuban and American. We have fences and gates and guards set up to prevent that from happening.

Q: What would happen if ... [inaudible]?

Secretary Perry: The guards there would have instructions to prevent that from happening.

Q: [Inaudible]

Secretary Perry: I don't know how far I can go in speculating on "what ifs" here, but the guards are there to prevent that from happening.

Q: [Inaudible]

Secretary Perry: We are concentrating all of our efforts and all of our planning now in dealing with the migrant flow. All of the resources in this area, all the Naval boats, all the naval ships and the Coast Guard ships are directed to that end. That is, to picking up the migrants. We do not have orders or directions at this time to effect an economic blockade. That's a very different operation. It would require more resources, more ships than we have located here to do that.

Q: [Inaudible]

Secretary Perry: That's an option, but that's not part of our present planning.

Q: [Inaudible]

Secretary Perry: We're still conducting the blockade in Haiti. Let me ask Admiral Miller to comment further on that.

Admiral Miller: We've shifted [some] of the assets we've had enforcing sanctions off of Haiti, but we still have six units enforcing the sanctions there. The Coast Guard units are still there with their migrant interdiction operation. And I'm very comfortable, and reported to Secretary Perry on the way down here, that the Haiti sanction effort is in force. The [inaudible] operation is in force, and the non-combatant evacuation operation, that capability is still intact while this operation is being conducted separately.

Q: [Inaudible]

Admiral Lahey: That hasn't been brought to our attention. We have enough assets out there between the Navy and the Coast Guard to pick up all the rafts that are spotted out there. They're probably safer during this period of time than they have ever been in the past, just because of the assets we have out there. Not only the surface assets, but also the aerial detection and monitoring that we're doing on a 24-hour-a-day basis.

Q: [Inaudible]

Admiral Lahey: No, we have a restricted zone out there. It was established, I believe, on Saturday morning. We have military planes flying in those areas, and that's just a safety precaution. I think it's 5,000 feet and below.

Q: [Inaudible]

Secretary Perry: We are making plans now to provide for up to 10,000 refugees at Guantanamo. And we will reach that, we'll have that provision ready by the end of this week. We also have the potential of accommodating up to 2,500 people at the TCI -- the Turks & Caicos Islands. We could provide an additional,

1869

perhaps, 2,500 at Suriname. Whenever the new government in Panama is in place the first of September, we also can provide a safehaven for refugees in Panama.

Thank you very much.

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